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ABSTRACT

This brief report compares the perspectives of funding agencies and community-based minority organizations (CBMOs) serving individuals with disabilities on the grant development and decision-making process. A survey that attempted to identify needs in existing grant development and service capacity was responded to by 41 funding agencies and 81 CBMOs in Massachusetts. Findings are reported in terms of: (1) funding opportunities (funding agencies often disseminate information in ways that CBMOs do not, such as computer databases and the Internet); (2) successful grants (funding agencies tend to focus on process whereas CBMOs emphasize community connections and relationship-building); and (3) efforts to expand capacities (funding agencies focus on awarding extra points for minority status whereas CBMOs emphasize collaboration and relationship-building). Three recommendations are offered to both funding agencies and CBMOs: first, be aware of and use all available mechanisms to learn about or publicize funding opportunities; second, grant developers and decision-makers should consider both the written quality as well as collaborative relationships in the proposals; and third, capacity-building efforts should include systems change to bring funding agencies and CBMOs together. (DB)

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Grant Development and Decision-Making: Comparison of Funding Agencies and Community Based Minority Organizations.

by Vaunne Ma, Jean Whitney-Thomas & Paula Sotnik

Introduction

Our nation's growing diversity prescribes that services for individuals with disabilities who are also members of diverse cultures be more culturally responsive. However, racial and ethnic minorities still remain outside the perimeters of service provision and leadership. Although national and state initiatives have been implemented to dispel these barriers, progressive systems change requires a comprehensive, cooperative endeavor, which is being addressed by the Capacity Interchange Project.

The Capacity Interchange Project is a training and technical assistance project funded through the US Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), in collaboration with Latino Health Institute, Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, and Evaluation Family Counseling, Haitians and Minorities, Inc., began the 3-year project in September, 1996. The project focuses on two main goals to increase services to individuals with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds:

- To build capacity of minority agencies to obtain state and federal funding.
- To change policy and practices within and between funding and minority agencies that result in culturally responsive information dissemination and service provision.

This report compares the perspectives of funding agencies and community-based minority organizations (CBMOs) on the grant development and decision-making process. Also included are recommendations for how these two groups can more effectively work together in the funding process.

Participants

A survey was developed to represent a systematic effort to identify needs in existing grant development and service capacity as well as to collect information on existing practices.

Surveys were sent to CBMOs along with Massachusetts state funding agencies and federal funding agencies (e.g. Department of Mental Retardation, Rehabilitation Services Administration). CBMOs were defined as non-profit or for-profit organizations that serve under-represented populations from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds and/or predominantly owned, managed, or staffed by individuals from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds. These findings represent the 41 responses received from funding agencies and 81 responses received from CBMOs.

Findings

Funding Opportunities

Funding agencies were asked how they share information on the availability of funds while CBMOs were asked how they learn about these funds. Findings indicated that:

- Both parties share and learn this information through direct mailings, newspapers, and networks with each other and with advocacy groups.
- Funding agencies disseminate information in ways that CBMOs do not use. For example, the State Goods and Services Bulletin and Grants and Contracts Bulletin are two of the most frequently used tools by funding agencies to announce grant opportunities. However, CBMOs do not report using these publications with the same frequency.
- Funding agencies use computer databases and the internet, while CBMOs rely on more traditional mechanisms to learn about funding opportunities (e.g. newspapers). In fact, CBMOs report a significant need for more computer access and equipment.

Successful Grants

To increase the number of grants awarded to CBMOs, both funding agencies and CBMOs need to have a common understanding of what is needed for a successful proposal. Personnel from both parties were asked to give their opinions on which factors determine whether a grant proposal is awarded or rejected. Table 1 lists the five most frequently reported characteristics of successful and unsuccessful grants by both CBMOs and funding agencies. As seen in the table:

- There is agreement between the funding agencies and CBMOs on the importance of the following item: proposals should be consistent with the funding agency's mission and policies, objectives should be measurable, plans for evaluation should be in place, and the CBMO should have a track record in the problem area.
- There are differences between the two perspectives that are interesting to note as well. Based on their responses to the survey, funding agency personnel tend to focus on the procedural or methodological characteristics of the written proposal such as the statement of the problem,

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the clarity of the proposal, and the proposed methods. CBMOs, on the other hand, emphasized community connections and relationship-building with the funding agency.

Table 1
Characteristics of Successful & Unsuccessful Grants

	Funding Agency:	CBMO:
Successful Grants	Consistent with funder's mission	Adherence to funder's policies
	addresses significant problem	Consistent with funder's mission
	Clear statement of problem	Reputation in community
	Realistic time frame	Administrative and fiscal stability
	Adherence to funder's policies	Understanding of the funder's mandate
Unsuccessful Grants	Objectives not measurable	Staffing, evaluation *
	Inappropriate method of addressing the problem	Objectives not measurable
	No track record	Community not involved planning
	Methods do not suit scope of the problem	Unrealistic time frame
	No evaluation plan	No track record

*these responses were listed as "other"

Efforts to Expand Capacities

The questionnaire asked funding agencies and CBMOs which strategies their organizations employ to assist CBMOs in building capacities. Both parties emphasized the importance of bidders' conferences. In addition, funding agencies reported that points for minority status are awarded in the review process. Funding agencies also provide examples of successful proposals upon request. CBMOs reported attending presentations on serving diverse cultural groups and collaborating on proposals with other organizations. It is interesting to note that the capacity building strategies employed by funding agencies and CBMOs represent different themes. The strategies reported by funding agencies are not interactive in that organizations gain points for their minority status or have the responsibility to request successful proposals. In contrast, CBMOs emphasize collaboration and relationship-building with other agencies and the community.

Discussion

Survey findings suggest that while there is some agreement on how information on funding opportunities are shared, what makes a successful proposal, and ways to enhance grant development capacities, there are also ways in which funding agencies and CBMOs differ from one another. For example, funding agencies emphasize technological methods for disseminating information while CBMOs report a significant deficit in internet and computer resources. It appears that CBMOs currently use more interactive approaches to capacity building. CBMOs see community and relationship building as integral to the grant development process. In order for funding agencies to be effective in reaching CBMOs and in order for CBMOs to be more successful in the funding process, both parties should consider the following recommendations:

1. **Be aware of and use all available mechanisms to learn about or publicize funding opportunities:** Despite the appeal of computerized dissemination, limited resources mean limited access for many organizations, so funding agencies should use multiple strategies for disseminating funding opportunities. Similarly, CBMOs should become aware of and use the bulletins and publications that are available to the public.
2. **Grant development and decision-making should consider both the written quality as well as collaborative relationships in the proposals:** CBMOs are obligated to produce a procedurally clear and high quality proposal. However, funding agencies should recognize that sharing resources and collaborating with other organizations can build capacities and enhance the quality of the proposal.
3. **Capacity-building efforts should include systems change to bring funding agencies and CBMOs together:** CBMO conferences and competition-specific technical assistance are useful but limited. Long term capacity building involves relationship building, multi-stakeholder involvement in the development of standards, and opportunities to expand skills and resources.

This brief reflects the contributions of staff at the Institute for Community Inclusion, in particular **Rooshey Hasnain** and **Cindy Thomas**, as well as Margaret Van Gelder of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation.

For more information on **The Capacity Interchange Project**, please contact Paula Sotnik, Program Director: 617-355-4788, 617-355-6956 (TTY), sotnik_p@a1.tch.harvard.edu

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